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Applicant Name: Ruth Pierce
Proceeding Name: 96-45 Author Name: _____
Lawfirm Name: _____
Contact Name: applicant_name Contact Email: ruthp@mlc.lib.ms.us
Address Line 1: Mississippi Library Commission
Address Line 2: P. O. Box 10700
City: Jackson State: MS
Zip Code: 39289 Postal Code: 0700
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BEFORE THE
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C.

MAY 22 1998

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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In The Matter of

Proposed Revision of Maximum Collection Amounts
for Schools and Libraries and Rural Health Care Providers

Public Notice
CC Docket No. 96-45, DA 98-872

Comments of the Mississippi Library Commission
May 22, 1998

Introduction

The Mississippi Library Commission wishes to submit these comments in response to the proposed revision, by the FCC, of the maximum collection amounts for schools, libraries, and rural health providers.

The Mississippi Library Commission is a statutorily created state agency responsible for the support and technical assistance to libraries in the State. In meeting its statutory responsibilities, the agency offers consulting services, coordination of interlibrary sharing of resources, reference assistance, and access to information not readily available in rural communities. One of the goals of the Library Commission is to assist libraries in bringing the benefits of telecommunications services to all of the libraries of Mississippi.

With this goal in mind, the Mississippi Library Commission supports the American Library Association's position that:

- The funding level for universal service fund discounts should remain at the \$2.25 billion cap originally designated for the library/school program. The FCC has estimated that the request for discounts in the first year will be approximately \$2.02 billion. The public libraries in Mississippi, even those in the most rural areas, have invested a great deal of time and effort in applying for Universal Service Fund Discounts. The money saved through these discounts will support additional services ranging from the upgrade of lines providing access to extended hours for rural branches. Cutting the funding level to \$1.67 billion in light of these funding requests would deny these benefits to the libraries serving the areas targeted for support by the Telecommunications Act.
- All eligible services should remain in place. Since 1995, the Mississippi Library Commission has fostered the development of a statewide telecommunications network that has brought Internet access, and reference software databases to even the most rural libraries. The Library Commission has provided support for these public libraries through telecommunications grants endorsed by the Mississippi Legislature. In short, the Mississippi Library Commission and the Mississippi Legislature has demonstrated a commitment to providing advanced telecommunications services to all areas of Mississippi. Universal Service Fund discounts on

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all currently eligible services (including Internet access and internal connections) will provide the necessary support that these local public libraries need to continue telecommunications services in all areas of Mississippi.

- The entire Universal Service Fund Program must be protected. Policy disputes must not be allowed to undermine a necessary program, or to disrupt that program's full implementation.

The Mississippi Library Commission applauds the commitment of the Federal Communications Commission to fully implement the provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 to the benefit of all libraries and schools in Mississippi.

Respectively submitted,

Ruth Pierce, Consultant
Mississippi Library Commission